

constellations on his face

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by [bonesandthebees \(bonesandcacti\)](#)

Summary

The wonder painted across Orpheus' face was... pure. His eyes were wide, and for the first time since Phil had met him, the boy seemed completely unaware and uncaring of what Phil was doing in that moment. His only focus was on the constellations above his head, and warmth bloomed in Phil's chest.

"It's amazing," Orpheus whispered.

The glowing freckles dotting Orpheus' face almost seemed like they were brighter than usual. As if they were trying to match the false stars above his head. In a way, it was like Orpheus was made of star stuff himself.

"I had a feeling you'd like it, little bird," Phil told him, and this time, the nickname was no accident.

or, Orpheus was interesting to Phil for many reasons.

or or, chapter 13 of the stars and their children but from Phil's POV

warning: spoilers for major plot points in the stars and their children

Notes

hi everyoneeeee I come bearing a gift!

so I actually wrote this alternate POV shortly after I wrote chapter 13 of the stars and their children. It was purely a writing exercise for me because I needed a clearer idea of what was going on in Phil's head. I didn't intend on publishing it at any point, but last night I was thinking about stars again and went and reread it and thought to myself "huh this is actually pretty good and fits with the rest of the plot" so here it is!

I did go through and edit it a bit to fix a few details, but nothing extensive. so keep in mind I wrote this wayyy back when I wrote chapter 13 of stars. just a disclaimer because I can't tell if it's any good or not lol

but **WARNING: this has spoilers for well beyond chapter 13 of stars because we are in phil's head.** If you have not finished reading the stars and their children I highly recommend

you do NOT read this because it contains a major plot spoiler for much later on in the fic. just something to keep in mind.

oh and also I recommend going to reread chapter 13 of stars if you haven't done so in a while. again, I wrote this without the intent to publish it, so some parts might be confusing if you don't remember what happens in that chapter.

okay that's all for now! hope you enjoy!

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

“I guess I’ll be seeing you soon?” Quackity asked, the tattoos along his arms rippling as he bowed.

Phil nodded. “I’ll summon you for a meeting in a few days. My plate’s been rather full the past several weeks, so you’ll have to excuse the delay.”

Quackity shrugged as he straightened back up. “Fine by me. Not like I have anything better to do at the moment.” He turned on his heel to leave the throne room, his shoes echoing across the stone floor. “Just let me know when you wanna talk. I got a *lot* of updates for you with the trade scene. The market’s a bit of a shitfest.”

“I’ll contact you soon,” Phil told him.

With that, Quackity nodded and turned on his heel, leaving the throne room. Now alone, Phil pushed to his feet, making his way over to the window.

His head was buzzing with a hundred different thoughts. There were always too many things to deal with when it came to a job like his, but things had been even more hectic than normal the past few weeks. Of course, he knew why this was.

Orpheus was going to be arriving soon. Phil knew he didn’t have a real reason to summon him. There was no particular need for him to inform the boy that the negotiations were going to be delayed another few days. But he wanted to see what his reaction was going to be.

Watching Orpheus over the past few weeks had been... interesting, to say the least. The boy was like a candle. His flame was flickering, dancing in the breeze and fading with each passing day, only to come roaring back to life as soon as something stoked his core.

Phil had to be careful. If he pushed too fast and too hard, his flame might extinguish entirely. He wanted the candle to burn bright and hot, because Orpheus was of no interest to him as a blackened wick. But it was a delicate balance he was struggling to strike. Parts of the plan were working, and parts weren’t. According to Techno, he and Theseus were arguing, which was to be expected. Ranboo told Techno that the two were at opposing views, with Theseus opening himself up to the possibility of joining the Empire, while Orpheus was still holding against it.

There was an interesting juxtaposition present within Orpheus: his stubborn pettiness that seemed to battle with his own insecurities and desire for validation. He wasn’t confident in himself, but he was stubborn enough to hold his ground even in the face of insurmountable odds.

In many ways, it was like looking in a mirror to the past. Orpheus was lost. He had no idea where he was going, but he was determined not to let anyone push him in a direction he didn’t like. Phil knew that feeling all too well. That’s why he had to be careful. If he pushed Orpheus too fast, he would run the opposite way just to spite him. Phil knew that because it’s the same thing he would’ve done when he was Orpheus’ age.

He mulled this over as he stared out at the glittering city. Things were faring surprisingly well, especially given the issues they were having with getting more blaziphane at the moment. Now, more than ever, Phil was thankful Techno had convinced him to buy extra to hold onto just in case.

Their storage wasn't going to last forever. But for the time being, they could afford to take things slow. If things went to shit, they could just take Eldingvegr back anyway and deal with the fallout from the brothers afterwards. It was better to ask forgiveness than permission, after all.

There was a soft *whoosh* as the doors to the throne room slid open. Phil suppressed a smile as he glanced over his shoulder and found Orpheus standing at the edge of the room.

Saying the boy looked tired was a kindness. The truth was, if he hadn't told Phil outright that he was nineteen, he would never have guessed Orpheus was so young. His cheeks were hollow, and the bags under his eyes were comparable to those of Phil's own. Even though his face was smooth and unwrinkled, there was a weariness in his dark eyes that was unmatched by those even ten years his senior.

The boy was wearing himself ragged. That much was obvious.

"Good morning, Orpheus," Phil said, dipping his head at him. He made it a point to not use the title of 'prince' on the boy anymore. It wasn't necessary. They both knew the game they were playing. Phil had always thought those formalities were fucking stupid anyway.

"Morning, Philza," Orpheus replied, not so much as nodding at him in greeting.

Phil blinked in surprise. That was new. Orpheus had already tested the waters of just calling him by his name without the title a few times now, but to not even dip his head in greeting? That was bold. And Phil could see how much it wore on him to do so. His shoulders were stiff, like he was fighting every cell in his body to keep himself from giving into the etiquette trained into him over the course of his entire life. The decision not to bow, or even nod at Phil was a conscious one.

Huffing, Phil felt a smile flicker over his face. A strange sort of pride swelled in his chest as he realized that Orpheus was finally starting to lose his hesitance around him. He was pushing back, and that was exactly what Phil wanted him to do. This game was no fun if the other player was too afraid to make any illegal moves.

He turned back to the window, waiting for Orpheus to walk across the room. A few beats passed in tense silence, and Phil wondered if Orpheus wasn't going to move at all. That would be moving past boldness to outright childish rebellion. The idea made Phil want to laugh out loud.

But then, there was the sound of footsteps, and from the corner of his eye Phil saw Orpheus walk up to stand beside him. He shifted his focus back on the city, taking in the twisting metal spires and the crowds of people moving along the streets.

This was *his* city. One he built from the ground up. Every once in a while, when he stepped back and took a look at it again, the only thing he could think of was how proud he was to have created something like that. If Zephys IV was his only remaining legacy after his death, he would be content with that alone.

Beside him, Orpheus took a steadying breath. Might as well not keep the kid waiting.

“I’ll get straight to the point. I called you in here to let you know we’re not going to jump back into negotiations right away,” Phil said, keeping his gaze fixed on the city.

“Why not?” Orpheus asked, his voice strained.

“The summit took up quite a bit of my time,” Phil explained, fingers finding the ends of his cloak and twisting the fabric around his talons. “I’ve been ignoring some of my duties to Zephys IV. Techno and I need some time to catch up on our work. Not to mention, I’m trying to get in contact with Themis to see what they make of your predicament, so I want to have some word with them before we continue on with anything.”

“Wait, you’re trying to contact Themis?”

The surprise was evident in Orpheus’ words. But it wasn’t just surprise. There was something else there. Worry. Anxiety. Maybe fear?

“Yes, but it’s been... difficult.”

Themis was pissing Phil off, to say the least. All attempts to contact them so far had been ignored. Phil knew the sirens were closed off, but considering he literally had a member of the Themisian royal family standing right beside him, he’d assume that at least would net him the chance to leave Queen Myrina a fucking message.

But he would get through. Phil was no fool, and he wasn’t going to put any of his plans for Orpheus and Theseus into motion without getting permission from the Themisians first. Although they didn’t seem to care what happened to the brothers, with sirens, it was always better to ask for permission considering they weren’t the type to forgive.

Something like amusement flickered across Orpheus’ face. Phil was sure he knew how difficult Themis could be.

“How long will things be delayed for?”

Phil smiled again. “I’m not sure. Hopefully not too long, but you never know with these things.”

Orpheus visibly bristled at this. “Bullshit. You’re just putting it off because you know we can’t do anything about it. You want to make us wait.”

This was getting fun. Orpheus was losing the shackles of his etiquette training, and was showing the fangs he had hidden behind his lips. The kid was a spitfire when he wanted to be, and Phil was delighted to see what made his feathers rustle.

“That’s not my main motivation. I do actually have work to attend to. But I won’t lie and say that’s not a factor,” Phil admitted, figuring there was no point in beating around the bush. “After all, it’s not like you and Theseus have much else to do these days. Unless you two count arguing as part of your schedule.”

The mark hit exactly where Phil aimed it. Orpheus reeled back, shock dancing over his face as Phil showed one of the many cards he had hidden up his sleeve. It was almost funny, how convinced Orpheus must’ve been that they were hiding their arguing effectively from him and Techno. Of course, this was all thanks to Ranboo and Theseus’ big mouth, but Orpheus didn’t need to know that part.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Orpheus told him. “Theseus and I haven’t been arguing.”

Oh, denial. Poor kid. He really had no idea.

“You really aren’t as good at hiding your emotions as you think you are, mate. Techno sees Theseus nearly every day at this point, and it’s not hard to pick up on the fact that he doesn’t take kindly to you being brought up as a topic of conversation.”

That wasn’t exactly wrong, but it wasn’t the full story. But it would be enough to keep Orpheus’ suspicion off of Ranboo, which was imperative since they couldn’t afford to lose that connection right now.

“He talks to the Emperor about me?” Orpheus asked, like *that* was the most surprising part of what Phil told him.

“Don’t get your feathers ruffled, little bird,” Phil crooned. “Theseus isn’t the one bringing you up, Techno is.”

Orpheus’ eyes widened, and it was only after the words left his mouth that Phil realized what he said. The nickname slipped out without him thinking about it, but he kept his face neutral, not wanting to let Orpheus know that.

It worked either way. Orpheus would probably think Phil was trying to demean him, reminding him that he was a child. He *was* a child, but Phil didn’t look down on him for that. If anything, that was why Phil enjoyed talking to him so much. It was fascinating to see the raw, untapped potential that was practically exploding off of him in sparks. Whenever Orpheus lost the battle with his self-control and snapped at him in a bout of childish rage, it was a reminder that he still had much to learn. And Phil had quite a bit to teach him.

But... that wasn’t why the nickname had slipped out. He’d just been thinking about how amusing it was to watch Orpheus get riled up, and how if he had wings like Phil’s own, they would probably be poofed up and bristling like an angry chick’s. He thought he was good at controlling his emotions, but Phil knew that if he had wings, they would be a dead giveaway to every single thing he was thinking.

Still, Orpheus would’ve made a fine ely-

Wait, what?

That wasn't a train of thought Phil had expected to go down. Orpheus was a tool for him to use. Clay for him to mold. Untapped potential that others had foolishly disregarded, which he had no plans to brush aside. Not... a chick. A protege, but nothing more.

Phil wasn't fatherly. He had never wanted children, and that wasn't going to change now.

(He ignored the way his feathers bristled, as if his own wings were trying to protest this.)

"Why does he bring me up?" Orpheus asked, forcing Phil to focus back on the conversation at hand.

"He just wants to get an idea of how you're doing. You stopped attending the training sessions, but that doesn't mean he's completely disinterested in you." Pausing, Phil rolled his shoulders to shake out the bristling of his feathers. "In the same vein, I'm not completely disinterested in Theseus either. But I find it easier to talk with you, while Techno finds it easier to talk with your brother."

"I don't know if easy is the word I would use to describe our conversations," Orpheus shot at him.

Once again, a rebellious child.

"That's a fair point. Talking to you isn't easy by any means, but it certainly is entertaining."

Orpheus clenched his jaw. "I think we have wildly different interpretations of our interactions."

"What, you don't enjoy our little chats?" Phil teased, knowing that even if he denied it, Orpheus didn't fully hate him. If he did, he wouldn't indulge him as much as he did.

"No, I don't."

So stubborn.

"I know that's not true. I'm well-aware you don't like me, but I also know that deep down, there's a part of you that likes this challenge. Your words are your weapon, and you enjoy getting a chance to use your tongue as a dagger," Phil pointed out.

Orpheus didn't like that one. His shoulders stiffened, and Phil could practically hear him denying all of it in his head.

"Stop acting like you know me," Orpheus hissed, folding his arms over his chest.

"But I do know you, Orpheus," Phil insisted. "Like I told you, you're a lot like I was when I was younger."

"And I don't believe that for one fucking second," Orpheus snapped. "I'm not a fool. I know you're trying to get inside my head."

And, well, he had a point. But,

“Maybe I am, maybe I’m not. Either way, I told you that I’m honest in my intentions. I’m not lying about that.”

It was obvious that Orpheus didn’t believe him. That was fine. Phil didn’t expect Orpheus to believe him at this point. Especially not when he was surrounded by politicians all lying to him for their own personal gain.

At the very least, Phil wasn’t lying to him about that. But he would have to figure that out for himself.



“Bioluminescence,” Phil explained, watching the twinkling lights in the ice with a soft smile. “Bacteria that were frozen in this ice thousands and thousands of years ago just naturally glow like this. One of the ways we would find stone pockets was by looking for the glow, because the bacteria always tend to cluster close to the deposits.”

The wonder painted across Orpheus’ face was... pure. His eyes were wide, and for the first time since Phil had met him, the boy seemed completely unaware and uncaring of what Phil was doing in that moment. His only focus was on the constellations above his head, and warmth bloomed in Phil’s chest.

“It’s amazing,” Orpheus whispered.

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“I had a feeling you’d like it, little bird,” Phil told him, and this time, the nickname was no accident.

Orpheus didn’t seem to register what Phil called him, or he just didn’t care. Either way, his attention was quickly caught by the wall, and Phil knew exactly what he was focusing on before he even said anything.

The names. Phil hadn’t forgotten about the names. He knew full well that they were down here when he chose to bring Orpheus to Cave Four.

“The miners carved their names into the wall here when they got close to the end of the stone deposit,” Phil explained to him.

“How long ago was this cave shut down?” Orpheus asked.

Phil paused. His eyes slid over the names carved into the stone. The sound of pickaxes slamming against stone rang in his ears. The air was thick with the smell of minerals and sulfur. It was like it was yesterday. Some days, it felt like he was still working in this cave.

“A long time ago,” was the only answer Phil could muster.

There were still questions dancing in Orpheus' gaze. Especially as his eyes drifted down the stone, onto a name that Phil knew he would recognize.

"How d'you think that looks, Phil?" Puffy asked him, her large eyes bright as she turned away from the wall, shaky handwriting displaying her name proudly in the stone.

Phil forced a smile on his face for her as he took the pickaxe from her hands. "It looks great."

"Now it's your turn," she told him, pointing at the space beneath her name for him to write his own.

Taking a breath to steady himself, Phil hunched his aching shoulders and pressed the tip of his pickaxe against the stone. By this time tomorrow, the name written here might be the only evidence that he ever existed. That any of them existed.

If they were going to die, at least they would have this cave. At least someone would be able to see these names and know that they were here. That they were people.

Orpheus' finger trailed over Puffy's name, and further down to the block that had once held his own name. His eyes lingered on the sole 'P' that had been left as evidence of his life down here. As proof that before he was Emperor Philza, he'd just been Phil.

When Orpheus straightened back up, Phil stretched out his wing, curling it around the boy's shoulders. His pajamas were thin, and Phil could see his hands trembling from the cold.

For some reason, this bothered him.

Phil rested his wing over Orpheus with the expectation that he would push it off. But although he stiffened, he made no moves to get away, and for some reason this warmed Phil from the inside out.

The boy with stars on his face let Phil rest his wing curl around him like a blanket. With sulfur in his nose, Phil took in the dark circles under his eyes, and the weariness weighing down every move he made. But there was still something more sitting in his dark eyes. Something hungry. Something *ambitious*.

Even if Orpheus insisted he wasn't like Phil, well... *Wilbur* was.

A forgotten prince. A disregarded advisor. A scared child. A little bird.

Wilbur already had the night sky on his face. Phil just had to show him how to hold the galaxy in the palms of his hands.

End Notes

god I miss stars!sandduo so much

I don't know if I'm going to write anything else in the stars universe. again, I already had this written from ages ago and just thought why not post it now? however, I am getting a bit of a nostalgia kick for stars atm so maybe I'll rewrite parts of another chapter in phil's POV? no promises. writing stars required a very specific mindset and writing mode for me to be in that I haven't fallen back to in nearly 6 months now, so I don't know if I'll be able to write anything else in the stars universe that I'd be satisfied with. but if I get the urge we'll have to see! if I do write any other bonus content like this it'll definitely be posted to this series so make sure to subscribe to the series so you get notified of that!

anyway I hope you guys enjoyed! make sure to leave a comment if you did, they really make my day <3

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